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SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS  
IN SOUTH KOREA

Submitted by the  
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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the  
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 31 May 1961. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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Nº 364

## SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS IN SOUTH KOREA

### THE PROBLEM

To assess the significance of the military coup d'etat in the Republic of Korea (ROK), and to estimate probable trends over the next few months.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. We believe that the present coup group dominated by Major General Pak Chong-hui will retain the principal elements of power in South Korea over the next few months at least, whether or not nominal civilian rule is re-established. (*Paras. 9, 13*)
2. The coup group will probably inject a new sense of drive and discipline into the ROK Government's economic and administrative efforts, and may make some headway, especially in curbing corruption. However, in view of the magnitude of the problems the new leaders are inheriting and are themselves creating, we believe they will not make much progress, and, because of their inexperience and a probable reluctance to accept outside advice, may make matters even worse. (*Para. 16*)
3. The coup group is composed of divergent elements and interests. Unless Pak and his colleagues can generate and enforce a greater unity than appears likely, ROK politics will probably follow a pattern of constant factional maneuvering and periodic shifts in power within the ruling military group. (*Paras. 9-10, 14*)
4. South Korea's coup leaders are a new and different breed from the civilian and the more senior military people with whom the US has had most contact. Their authoritarian and nationalistic stamp suggests that they will be less receptive to US guidance. Furthermore, they will be tough, determined, and difficult to deal with. They will probably continue South Korea's alignment with the US, recognizing their country's dependence on the US, but at the same time will seek to assert South Korea's independence in military, economic, and political affairs. ROK-UN military command relationships will probably be a source of continuing difficulty. (*Paras. 17-20*)
5. The declared position of the regime is anti-Communist, and available evidence does not support allegations of Pak's continuing ties with the Communists. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that he is a long-term Communist agent, or that he might redefect. Also, Communist ends in South Korea could be ad-

vanced in the event of student and public uprisings against repressive government measures and probable deteriorating economic conditions. (Para. 21)

6. The coup leaders have been preoccupied with internal matters and have not yet given clear definition of their intended foreign policies. (Para. 22)

## DISCUSSION

### I. INTRODUCTION

7. Since 16 May, a few dissident army officers, led by Major General Pak Chong-hui, have established their control over the Republic of Korea and have moved rapidly and effectively to consolidate that control. They have placed under arrest or detention former Prime Minister Chang Myon and the members of his cabinet, a number of high ranking military officers and political leaders, and approximately 3,000-4,000 civilians. They have forced the cabinet's resignation, dissolved the legislature, banned political parties, and imposed rigid censorship. Full executive powers have been taken over by the coup group's 32-man "Supreme Council for National Reconstruction," which supervises the activities of a new cabinet composed of military officers. President Yun Po-sun has been forced to remain in office as the only link with the pre-coup constitutional structure. In seizing power, the coup group ignored the UN Command and US counsel, and has since continued to take a generally tough line with US officials.

8. The coup took place against a background of ROK inexperience in self-government, after years of stultifying authoritarian rule by the Japanese and then Rhee, and of reaction against the lack of direction, purpose, and governmental force which has characterized ROK political life since Rhee. A small, disciplined and well-organized minority was able quickly to immobilize all effective opposition by bringing decisive power to bear on the nerve centers of the state. The Prime Minister abandoned his responsibilities and hid in fear of his life; the President of the Republic was a political enemy of the Prime Minister and welcomed almost any development

which might hasten the latter's fall. The Chief of Staff of the ROK Army equivocated; other commanding officers in strategic positions were unwilling to provoke bloodshed within the military. The public felt so little enthusiasm for the government that it remained passive and made no effort to save the representative government it had won only a year before in the revolt against Rhee.

### II. THE COUP GROUP

9. The moving spirit of the coup appears to be Major General Pak Chong-hui, most recently Deputy Commander, Second ROK Army. Convicted by court martial in 1949 for Communist activities, Pak was dismissed from the army. He was reinstated in 1950 at the outset of the Korean War and has since had a distinguished career. Enjoying a reputation for effectiveness and honesty, he has been an active agitator against corruption and ineffectiveness in the top army command and in the civil government. He has apparently been plotting the coup during much of the past year. We have little firm information on Pak's present political views or close associates, and it is difficult at this time to assess what role personal ambition may have played in his designs.

10. Lt. Col. Kim Chong-p'il, Pak's brother-in-law, appears to be Pak's principal adviser and to be in charge of intelligence and investigation activities and of measures to consolidate the coup group's control. Kim has been one of the most important of the group of younger field-grade officers who have long agitated for housecleaning within the army, and who appear to constitute the extremist element in the coup group. There is also a number of able senior officers who, though not active

participants in the coup, have since joined its ranks and now compose much of the Supreme Council and the cabinet. These men appear to constitute a more moderate element. Of these men, Lt. Gen. Chang To-yong, Army Chief of Staff, is the nominal head of government. Other moderates include Kim Hong-il, current Foreign Minister, and Brigadier General Kim Yun-kun, commander of the marine unit which spearheaded the seizure of Seoul. Pak himself cannot yet be identified clearly in one or the other group.

11. The coup group's official rationale is that drastic action was required to correct the inaction and corruption of the civil government in the face of the ROK's desperate need for economic rehabilitation and clean government. The group was also motivated by beliefs that its members were not receiving proper treatment from top commanders, and that the military as a whole was being hamstrung by political interference from the civil government. The coup group displayed discipline, unity, care in planning, security,<sup>1</sup> and skillful execution not usually associated with Korea.

12. We believe that an intense sense of nationalism and independence also motivates the coup group. Their behavior to date suggests that their views concerning the manner in which Korea should be governed, the role of civil authority, and the nature of US-Korean relations are very different from those of the ROK officials and senior officers with whom the US has previously had most contact. Their self-confidence and their willingness to bypass or ignore US officials indicate that they are determined to govern South Korea in their own style.

### III. PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

13. The coup has probably ended representative government in South Korea for the foreseeable future, and civil authority over the

<sup>1</sup> General Pak's coup plotting was known to the Korean and US Governments in late April. The actual timing of the coup, however, was successfully concealed even from ROK Army C.I.C. A number of key ROK officials did not take seriously the coup reports.

military will probably not soon be re-established. Even if a facade of civilian government is set up, military authority will probably continue to dominate.

14. We believe that the coup group will retain the principal elements of power in South Korea over the next few months at least, and that Pak will probably continue to be the dominant figure. This group's unity will probably decline, however, as it faces the accumulating problems of state and an almost certain continuance of the factionalism which has characterized ROK political and military life. Thus, unless Pak and his colleagues can generate and enforce a greater unity than appears likely, ROK politics will probably follow a pattern of constant factional maneuvering and periodic shifts in power within the ruling military group.

15. Having virtually destroyed ROK constitutionalism and parliamentary rule, the coup group will have to depend for survival on its own unity and success in achieving its stated objectives. While there will be fewer restraints on the actions which the ruling group can take, the destruction of constitutionalism will at the same time remove restraints on would-be plotters against the ruling group. Political considerations are likely to distract the military from its primary mission of protecting the country against the Communists and to reduce the professional level of the military establishment in general. The resulting instability in South Korea may court revolutionary protest from the urban intellectual groups and the poverty-ridden masses.

16. The coup leaders will probably inject a new sense of drive and discipline into the ROK Government's economic and administrative efforts. They may make some headway in these endeavors, especially towards stamping out corruption.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, South Korea's continuing basic economic weaknesses are enormous: the lack of natural resources,

<sup>2</sup> General Pak and his colleagues have demonstrated their capability to take the kind of ruthless and forceful measures which would be necessary to achieve this, and themselves have good reputations on this score—a notable exception being General Chang To-yong, frontman for the coup.

skills, capital, and significant industrial development, and the corruption which permeates the national life. Moreover, the coup was essentially an act of protest, and the new leaders appear to have come to power with neither clear administrative or economic plans nor the skills necessary to deal with the financial and economic problems they face. No firm conclusions can as yet be drawn as to the degree of overall economic and administrative success the new leaders will achieve. Much of their effort thus far has been confined to consolidating their seizure of power, and their degree of success will depend in part on the extent of foreign aid and technical assistance they receive and the expert guidance they accept. On balance, however, in view of the magnitude of the problems the new leaders are inheriting and are themselves creating, we believe they will not make much progress, and, because of their inexperience and a probable reluctance to accept outside advice, may make matters even worse.

17. The present coup leaders are unlikely to show the same confidence in the US as the previous ROK Government. However, Pak and his colleagues are fully aware of South Korea's military and economic dependence upon the US, and once they feel their position secured, will probably take moves to reassure the US. Nevertheless, the new regime will be tough, determined, and difficult to deal with, and its authoritarian and nationalistic stamp suggests that it will not be readily receptive to US guidance, and will seek to assert South Korea's independence in military, economic, and political affairs.

18. Moreover, Pak himself probably holds a number of grievances against the US,<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>3</sup> For example: (a) last July's agitation for a wholesale removal of allegedly corrupt or inefficient senior officers, on the part of many of the field grade officers of Pak's present group, was resisted by General Magruder (as a threat to the ROK Army's combat effectiveness); (b) Pak apparently believes that General Magruder's influence was twice brought to bear within top ROK Army leadership to effect Pak's transfer of duty from the ROKA Logistic Command in July 1960, and from ROKA G-3 in December 1960; and (c) Pak has reacted adversely to US statements of support of the Chang Myon government when the coup occurred.

unless he gains sufficient confidence in US sympathy and support, will probably regard the US as hostile and will remain intransigent. Pak probably does not intend to push the US to the point of risking continued US support or of provoking domestic opposition among the many strongly pro-US ROK officials and officers. However, he and his group probably consider that South Korea's strategic importance to the US is so great that they can be strong-willed and demanding in their relations with the US without undue risk of extreme US retaliation.

19. UN Command authority over the Korean armed forces has been a crucial point of disagreement between the US general who is Commander-in-Chief, UN Command, and the coup group which ignored his authority. An agreement has been reached which restores in considerable degree the UN Command's authority. It is unlikely, however, that the restoration of this authority will be complete, or that subsequent disputes and difficulties will be avoided.

20. Interpretation of authority and responsibility could become confused, and US-ROK frictions increased, if members of the coup regime exercise both military command and government functions. The coup regime may be expected to insist on prompt conclusion of a full Status of Forces Agreement—which the US had already agreed to undertake—but will be more intractable than the previous administration. To cope with US pressure the coup regime may make use of threats to move in the direction of neutralism.

21. Available evidence does not support allegations of Pak's continuing ties with the Communists. This question cannot be answered with finality, however, and we cannot rule out the possibility that he is a long-term Communist agent who might, in time, seek to maneuver the ROK into some type of Korean unification which would benefit the Communist cause. Similarly, we cannot exclude the possibility that, even though no longer a Communist, he might redefect and take some action, in desperation over the course of events in South Korea, designed to ingratiate himself once again with the Communists. Even

if he is firmly anti-Communist, his rule could become so oppressive, amid probable deteriorating economic conditions, that students, intellectuals, and various opposition groups might take to the streets against the regime. Many might become more susceptible to Communist overtures. Lastly, the radical younger officers in the coup group might come to see unification as a panacea for South Korea's seemingly incurable ills and proceed with foolhardy schemes of union with the North.

22. The coup leaders have been preoccupied with internal matters and have not yet given clear definition of their intended foreign policies. The regime professes to be strongly anti-

Communist, and none of its statements to date give evidence of interest in accommodation with North Korea. The regime's posture toward Japan has not yet been clarified. On the one hand, most of the senior leaders of the coup received military and university training in Japan and do not appear to be strongly anti-Japanese. On the other hand, younger coup elements have professed strongly anti-Japanese sentiments. Even if the regime proves willing to move toward settling outstanding issues with Japan, the Japanese Government may itself face increasing domestic political opposition in dealing with a militaristic ROK regime.